

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<u>Project Name:</u> Dighans Break Request	<u>Proposed Implementation Date:</u> April 2012
<u>Proponent:</u> Michael Dighans and Murray Dighans Jr. 600 Peerless-Lustre Rd Peerless, MT 59253	
<u>Type and Purpose of Action:</u> Michael Dighans and Murray Dighans Jr. have requested to break 183.0 acres of expired CRP land (56.8 acres in State lease #3808 and 126.2 acres in State lease #3809). The previous CRP contracts expired on September 30, 2011 and the acreage was denied re-enrollment. If permission to break is granted, the expired CRP acreage would be used for small grain production.	
<u>Location:</u> L #3808 = Lots 1, 2, S2NE4 of Sec. 1 - T35N – R44E L # 3809 = Lots 3, 4, E2SW4 of Sec. 31 - T36N – R45E	<u>County:</u> Daniels

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	<p>The proponents, Michael Dighans and Murray Dighans Jr., have made a break request to the Glasgow Unit Office (GUO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The request will be reviewed per DNRC land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.</p> <p>FWP was solicited for comment on September 27th, 2011. Drew Henry, Region 6 Wildlife Biologist, responded to the letter.</p> <p>NRCS and FSA administered the former CRP contract, and they require the lessee to follow specific conservation guidelines to remain eligible for future farm programs and payments. These agencies may or may not be involved in the future management of the land proposed for breaking.</p>
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>Action Alternative: Grant proponents permission to convert 183.0 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to annually planted small grain crops.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny the proponents permission to break 183.0 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover.</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4.GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</p> <p>Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>99% of the soils present are Class III soil types. The 126.2 acre field, in section 31, has 7 Caragana tree lines running north and south across the length of the field. These tree lines were planted as an upland game bird enhancement project, so their main purpose is not erosion control. The proponents plan to leave the tree lines intact and would also be leaving a 10 foot grass strip between the field edge and the trees.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics will occur.</p>
<p>5.WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>Annually planted small grain crops would utilize the available water of the soil similarly to the tame grasses that are currently present. The reservoir in the W2NE4 of Section 1 fluctuates greatly depending on the amount of moisture in a given year. The reservoir reached nearly 8 acres in the wet summer of 2011, but it is typically about $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of an acre in size. This reservoir is located on the pasture land to the west of the area proposed to be broken. The grass buffer between the reservoir and area proposed for breaking would vary depending on the reservoirs level. FWP recommends a 100m buffer between agricultural lands and wetlands. GUO staff will be visiting this site in the spring of 2012 to determine if a buffer is necessary.</p> <p>Action: The project is not anticipated to impact the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface water.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>
<p>6.AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to air quality are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality will occur.</p>
<p>7.VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program did not identify any plant species of concern or any potential plant species of concern. The present tame grass stand (various wheat grasses with a fair amount of alfalfa) would be broken up and small grain crops</p>

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	<p>would be annually planted and harvested. The 7 Caragana tree lines in Section 31 would be left intact along with 10 ft strips of grass on each side of the lines.</p> <p>Action: The grass vegetation cover would be converted to annually seeded cropland. No rare plants or cover types are present in the current stand of vegetation.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.</p>
<p>8.TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</p> <p>Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (NHP) lists the Brook Stickleback as a species of concern and the Swainson's Hawk as a potential species of concern within the project area's township. The Iowa Darter is a fish species and its primary habitat is small prairie rivers. Swainson's Hawk is a bird species that primarily relies on sagebrush grassland as its primary habitat. The proposed project would not impact either of these species primary habitats.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p>
<p>9.UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program did not identify any plant species of concern or any potential plant species of concern. The present tame grass stand (various wheat grasses with a fair amount of alfalfa) would be broken up and small grain crops would be annually planted and harvested. The Montana Natural Heritage Program (NHP) does list the Brook Stickleback as a species of concern and the Swainson's Hawk as a potential species of concern within the project area's township. The Iowa Darter is a fish species and its primary habitat is small prairie rivers. Swainson's Hawk is a bird species that primarily relies on sagebrush grassland as its primary habitat. The proposed project would not impact either of these species primary habitats.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>
<p>10.HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>The acreage proposed to be broken was previously farmed and does not contain any historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological resources.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas historical,</p>

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	<p>archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p>
11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	<p>The land surrounding the project area consists of a mixture of agricultural, grazing, and CRP lands. The project area is not near any prominent topographic features, no excessive noise or light will be produced, and it is not visible from a populated or scenic area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.</p>
12.DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.</p>
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>Returning the expiring CRP acreage to agricultural production would slightly increase the area's small grain production.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to industrial and commercial activities are anticipated. Agricultural activity would slightly increase.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities and production will occur.</p>

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action: The proposed action may slightly increase tax revenue from revenues generated through the production and sale of the crops.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.</p>
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	<p>Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services will occur.</p>
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	<p>Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.</p>
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	<p>The area proposed for breaking is publically accessible. The current stand of CRP grass is likely utilized by the public for hunting whitetail deer, upland birds, mule deer, and antelope. The removal of this type of cover will reduce bedding and nesting habitat; however, the annually planted stands of small grains may provide a beneficial food source for various wildlife species during certain times of the year.</p> <p>Action: Hunting opportunities for the public to pursue upland game birds, whitetail deer, mule deer, and antelope on this acreage would remain, but the quality may or may not be impacted. No other impacts to recreational or wilderness activities are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.</p>
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	<p>Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.</p>
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles will occur.</p>
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the	Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness

action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	and/or diversity are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By: _____
Matthew Poole (Land Use Specialist)

Date: March 2, 2012

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Select Action Alternative
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	Surrounding land is primarily agriculture and soils are class III highly suited for farming.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis: <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: R. Hoyt Richards Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

_____/s/_____
Signature Date: March 2, 2012